

Testimony of Nanci Planeta before the Connecticut Government Administration and Elections Committee, March 19, 2010.
Re: HB 5520.

My name is Nanci Planeta and I am here today to discuss House Bill 5520, and specifically Section 19 of that Bill.

This is a bad idea which was proposed and not approved last year. Contrary to what you may hear, this is not something which the Department of Environmental Protection is seeking. I have attached a letter from the Commissioner herself stating "The Department of Environmental Protection is not the sponsor of this legislation, nor are we supportive of it." The portions of this "swap" which are to take place in Haddam are seriously flawed and contrary to the policies of the State.

I will first address the parcel along the Connecticut River. This parcel was acquired by the Department of Environmental Protection because of its important qualities. The Connecticut River has been given a national scenic rivers designation, and land along this portion of the River is included in the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. We as residents of the State have a duty to retain and maintain as much of the endangered land along the River as possible for future generations. The areas adjacent to the property on which the possible future hotel would be located have been used for generations for manufacturing, and I am certain that there will need to be remediation on a large scale before this property can be used for development. Public sewers and water would also have to be brought to this location, at considerable expense. To portray this as anything but a long-term expense is misleading and contrary to the evidence.

Regarding the Riverhouse Property. As a neighbor to this property, I can tell you that it is important in its entirety. The owner of the Riverhouse has consistently stated that he is only interested in transferring 54 of the acres, and developing the remaining 33 acres, but the proposed legislation does not make this distinction at all. This leads me to question whether the State and the property owner even agree as to the terms of what is to be transferred. To split this property into

pieces, with 33 acres to be developed and the remainder to be preserved may sound like a victory but it would destroy the continuity of the space. The omitted 33 acres is actually the prime portion of the Riverhouse Property. Presently, the acreage connects the Cockaponsett State Forest to the town-owned firehouse property and Route 154. This property, if owned entirely by the State, would provide both town and state residents more convenient access to the forest from two State Highways. It would also create a walking access from the center of the municipality, which is a rare thing. Additionally, the fragmentation created by omitting the 33 acres from the portion to be owned by the State would break up important habitats, and place houses directly in the middle of a deeply forested area. While this may be attractive from a homeowner's standpoint, it is a mistake from an environmental protection standpoint. The property owner has claimed that the 54 acres contain important hardwood trees but this is another case of the State not knowing what it is acquiring. Those trees were logged within the last ten years and there are few if any large hardwoods remaining on that portion of the site. Also the removal of the firewood from the logging damaged the existing wetlands and watercourses on both the site and my adjacent property.

This land swap idea has been poorly thought out. The values of the respective parcels may or may not be equivalent. The language in the bill does not even give acreage for the proposed Goodspeed property or the Riverhouse property located east of High Street. That it could be "all or a portion of" just gives me pause, and should give this Committee pause as well.

I would urge this Committee to remove Section 19 from House Bill 5520. I am unclear who this is supposed to benefit, but it does not benefit the residents of the Town of Haddam or State of Connecticut as a whole.

Thank you for your time.

Nanci L. Planeta

Subject: Response from Commissioner Amey Marrella from the Dept. of Env. Protection

Date: Wednesday, March 17, 2010 6:39 PM

From: Colon, Carmen <Carmen.Colon@ct.gov>

To: <sbotelle@yahoo.com>

Cc: "Tyler, Tom" <Tom.Tyler@ct.gov>

Conversation: Response from Commissioner Amey Marrella from the Dept. of Env. Protection

March 15, 2010

Sharon Botelle
sbotelle@yahoo.com

Dear Ms. Botelle:

Thank you for your e-mail dated March 12, 2010 that you sent regarding the legislatively proposed land swap in Haddam and East Haddam. I recognize that this issue, first proposed last year, has generated a great deal of local attention and concern, and I thank you for the opportunity to clarify the Department's position on the topic.

The Department of Environmental Protection is not the sponsor of this legislation, nor are we supportive of it. We are aware that local business interests in Haddam and East Haddam have advanced a plan to develop a portion of state land near the Connecticut River in Haddam, and that they have offered lands that they own on both sides of the Connecticut River in exchange.

As you may know, House Bill 5520 is scheduled to be heard at a Public Hearing before the Government Administration and Elections Committee on Friday, March 19th. I would urge you to address your concerns regarding this proposal with members of the General Assembly.

We appreciate the time you took to write to the Department, and trust that this response addresses your concerns. If you would like to speak further on these issues,

please feel free to contact Tom Tyler, Director of DEP's Office of Constituent Affairs and Land Management. Tom can be reached at 860-424-3099 or at tom.tyler@ct.gov <<mailto:tom.tyler@ct.gov>>

Yours truly,
/s/

Amey Marrella

Commissioner

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